

Soldiers Online

The COOL ones celebrate it

Donna Rae



With its six runs, the Giant Snow Slide is Como Park's biggest attraction and delights more than 20,000 riders a year.

KIDS
are drawn
to
slides...

like iron
to
magnets

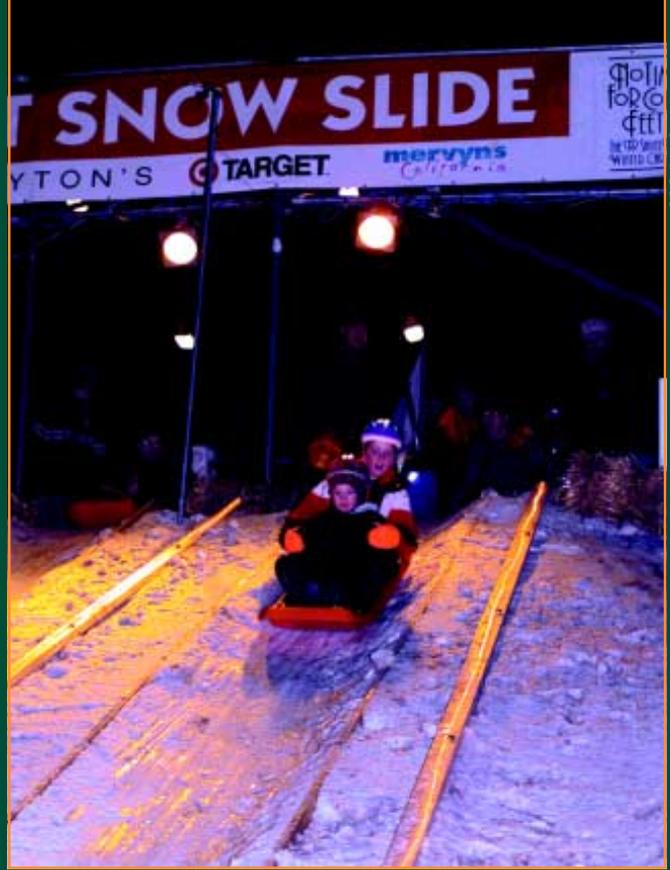
THE Giant Snow Slide built by the 367th Engineer Battalion for the Saint Paul, Minn., Winter Carnival is so big it draws kids from as far away as Europe and South America.

"I loved it," said Elizabeth La Riva, a Peruvian 13-year-old who rode the slide during the 2000 carnival. "It was like a big block of ice — I got going really fast."

The slide has become an annual part of the event that organizers claim is the nation's oldest and largest winter

SSG Bill Geddes is a member of 364th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, 88th Reserve Support Command Public Affairs Office.

Winter Carnival



SSG Bill Geddes

Children make a night run down the Giant Snow Slide built by members of the 367th Engr. Bn. for last year's carnival.



Carol Jean Christopherson

The Winter Carnival ends each year with a torchlight parade and fireworks spectacular that reminds revelers that spring will return to St. Paul.

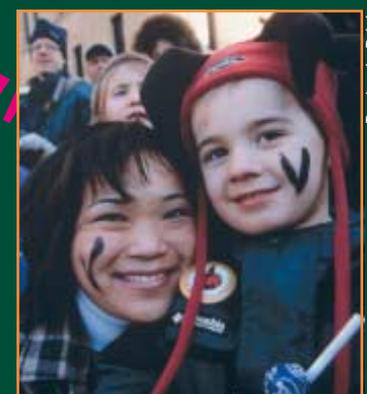
festival. In 2001 the carnival celebrates its 115th year as "The Coolest Celebration on Earth," and organizers expect to entertain as many as 500,000 visitors during the 10 days of winter fun that begin Jan. 12.

As the 327th, headquartered in St.

FEARTEH
Story by SSG Bill Geddes

Cloud, Minn., has built bigger and better slides for each of the recent winter festivals, the unit's collective knowledge and experience has led to improvements in construction, resulting in a more-than-pleased customer. For example, the slide built for the 2000 carnival provided six runs that took sledders on a 200-foot descent and attracted more than 20,000 riders. "We're always excited about the slide," said Jennifer Eyrich, festival director for the Heritage Foundation, which produces the Winter Carnival. "A lot of what we've done could not have happened without the help of the Army Reserve."

The annual festival began in 1886, when a New York reporter described



Benjamin Brink

Children are the focus of many of the carnival's events. This suitably attired youngster took part in the King Boreas parade.

St. Paul as the "Siberia of North America, quite possibly unfit for human habitation."

Responding with typical Minnesota pride, Saint Paulites united to not only prove their city was a most desirable place to live but that its residents



More than 250,000 people visit Rice Park to view the completed ice sculptures, which remain throughout the 10-day Winter Carnival.

actually celebrated the dominant winter season that distinguishes the region from the rest of the nation.

While much has changed since the first festival, the spirit and pride of the carnival still engulf the city. Activities spread throughout the Saint Paul community include parades, dances, cultural and historical events, and sports competitions. But many of the main attractions take place at Como Park, where visitors will find the Giant Snow Slide, snow and ice sculptures, an ice skating rink, an ice maze and the Wilderness Experience, which gives participants a chance to try snow shoeing, cross-country skiing and even dogsledding.

“But the slide has become the main focus of the carnival,” said CPT David Skavnak, project officer for the first Giant Snow Slide, built in 1999. “The carnival has one premier attraction each year, and in the absence of an ice castle, the slide is the cornerstone event.”

Considering that Minnesotans claim that the 1992 castle was the largest ice structure ever built, battalion engineers have had some big expectations to live up to.

Building the first slide presented some complex structural challenges. “We begged, borrowed and scrounged what little information was available

on ice structures,” Skavnak explained. “After that, we had to go back to what we already knew.”

Combat engineers have a “woodchuck” manual, Skavnak said, using a slang term for their basic document, FM 5-34. “We can calculate, using nonstandard bridge calculations, what kind of strengths we’re working with, what kind of loads come to bear on almost any structure. That’s almost what we were looking at — a nonstandard bridge with a deck on it.”

Improvements on the first slide have been made every year since. “Last year, rather than using a plywood frame for the runs, we used ice blocks inset into the runs,” said CPT Eric Ekstrom, project officer in charge for the 2000 Giant Snow Slide.

“That prevents the washboarding effect we had in the early slide, and reduces maintenance on the runs. It also increases the speeds on the runs, which isn’t necessarily a good thing, being that last year they were running into the hay bales at the ends of the runs and knocking them over.”

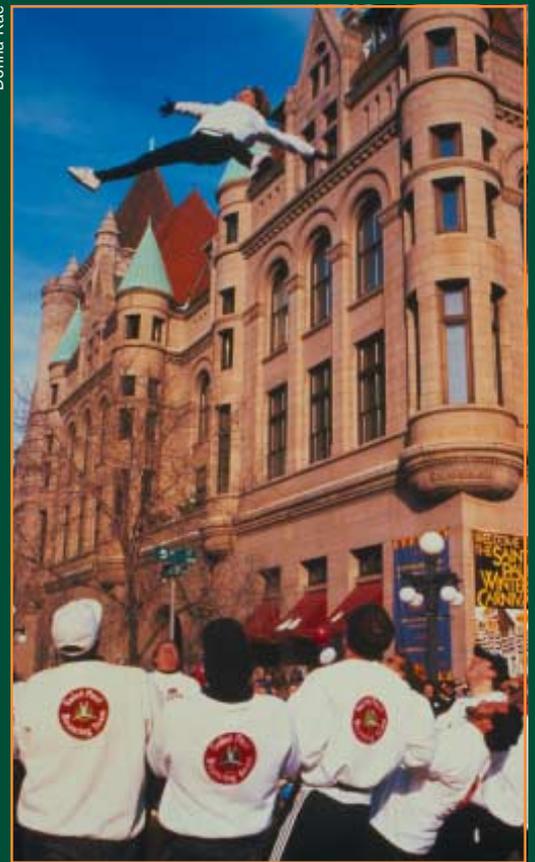
Longer runs eliminated that problem, but the engineers added other improvements. Better scaffolding not

only made the building process easier, it made it possible to build a taller slide.

“It’s a different scaffolding system, put together more like an erector set,” said Ekstrom. “And it has unlimited potential for design variations, which makes it ideal for our application.”

But the scaffolding, used for the main deck of the slide and the stairway leading up to it, is only part of

The Giant Snow Slide has become the main focus of the carnival, but...



Successive Bouncing Blanket Teams have performed at every Winter Carnival since 1886. The tradition mimics a tactic of Eskimo hunters, who would toss a man in the air so he could spot buffalo herds.



visitors will also find snow and ice sculptures, an ice skating rink, an ice maze

and the Wilderness Experience.

the massive slide.

“You have to rely on Mother Nature for the rest of the materials,” Ekstrom said.

Hundreds of cubic yards of snow are gathered from the nearby state fairgrounds and transported to the construction site. The snow, along with thousands of gallons of water, is used to build the runs. And just in case the snow is in short supply, the engineers have a snowmaker, provided by a local ski area, to use as a backup.

Snow and water are also used to construct walls around the deck, creating a snow castle effect. Hay bales line the runs to keep riders in their own lanes, and more hay is used at the bottom to stop sliders finishing a fast run.

The care that goes into the building of the slide is obvious.

“I love doing projects like this,”

said SFC Maurice Britts, platoon sergeant for the construction section working on last year’s slide. “Building things is what our section is all about, and this gives us a chance to get out here and test our knowledge and training.”

“The slide is fabulous,” said Tom Trudeau, a member of the Vulcans Fire and Brimstone division of the Saint Paul Winter Carnival. “I live in the neighborhood, so I was watching the construction, and the Army Reserve does a great job. Without them, it just wouldn’t get done. We

couldn’t possibly do it.”

The slide has brought the Army Reserve national attention as well. In past years, “Good Morning America” has used the slide as a backdrop for broadcasts highlighting the carnival.

But when it comes right down to it, it’s the image presented by the Reserve unit that has the biggest impact. “I’ve always had a high regard for the Reserves,” said Trudeau. “This just goes to show me that they’re not only out there protecting the country, they’re also working, making a better way of life for everybody.” □



Benjamin Brink

A young Winter Carnival participant and friend clamber aboard an antique fire engine for a better view of the King Boreas parade, one of the event’s highlights.



Donna Rae

The antique sleigh and cutter rally is a favorite of carnival goers. Restored sleighs and one-horse cutters provide a nostalgic ride through St. Paul’s parks.